

## **The Northern Renaissance Artistic Movement and Humoralism**

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### **1. Introduction**

The Renaissance is an epoch in history that many are familiar with. It is a period well known for its great Italian artists; Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo Burnarroti, Donatello, Raphael. Besides the namesakes of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, there were other great Italian thinkers as well: Niccolo Machiavelli and Marsilio Ficino to name a few. Collectively, there is this idea that the Renaissance movement, which is undoubtedly Italian, spread forth from Italy like a brilliant wash of light, bringing magnificent art, mathematics, philosophy, and architecture to the rest of dark and troubled Europe. The Renaissance is often viewed as the recovery of the greater Classical knowledge of the Greeks. This “recovery” is understood to have been responsible for the altering of all aspects of European culture. However, many of the images of the Renaissance, in most people’s minds, are that of the great Renaissance artworks. There is no doubt that our Ninja Turtles namesakes were incredibly talented artists, but is their success and skill solely in the hands of the Italians, or were there external influences that changed the landscape of Italian art?

This idea of the Renaissance, that of the Italians single-handedly changing the entire landscape of art is a longstanding idea. But let us entertain a different approach to examining evidence from Northern Europe. Far north of Italy in the Low Countries, an extremely talented and groundbreaking artistic style was developing. Many of the things that are associated in Italian Renaissance imagery began in the Low Countries. The inclusion of humoralism and the slow march towards Mannerism has been attributed to the Italians, but actually originates in the Northern European region of the Low Countries.

### **2. The Low Countries: A Brief History**

Historically the Low Countries has referred to the geographic areas of the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of North Eastern France. This region of Northern Europe is located on the Southern coast of the North Sea, conveniently situated in a region with access to Mid-Europe

on the Rhine River. This position on the coast resulting in access to the sea and to continental waterways would result in monopolized trade in the region for hundreds of years. This position on the coast, and a major artery of transportation, would help to foster the independent trading culture that would develop in region throughout the centuries.

While the region was ideally positioned for the international trade to come, being located on the coast, this advantageous position would also be vulnerable to varying powers throughout the years. The Frisians, a North Sea raiding tribe, would first exploit this exposure to the sea and this control would be maintained until the Franks took control of the region in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The Franks also sought control of this region due to its location, being easily accessed via the Rhine and the North Sea. This pattern of occupation would always bring the main focus of the locals on maintaining their independence from their occupiers. They sought control over their own business as much as possible.

While the location was well suited to trade, initially, it was not the primary focus of economic activities within the region. This Frankish influence resulted in a feudal, agrarian system of government.<sup>2</sup> Slowly, trade became the focus of economic activity in the region. Due to their superb location, they were able to become a very powerful trading center, beginning during Frankish times. It was during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, during Frankish occupations, that several small villages were found that were destined to become large, powerful cities. Those cities include Ghent, Brugge, Antwerp, and Tournai.<sup>3</sup> During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the region continued to grow in independence and power, as it was now independent of the Franks. But full autonomy was still out of reach, as this region occupied the role of a vassal of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> During the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Low Countries would still be beholden to foreign powers, unable to maintain full independence in the area that was becoming the most important: trading autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

The Flanders region was one of these areas with a fierce desire for independence. Located on an extensive river system, Flanders evolved into a powerhouse of the cloth trade in the region.<sup>6</sup> This would be one of the first regions to collectively band together in order to control trade within the region. The invested parties, merchants and producers, came together in a coalition designed to protect all of their invested interest in trade. Because of the success of these guilds, many of the trading cities in this region grew very powerful, and still exist today. These cities, which began as trading towns, are Ghent, Haarlem, and Utrecht.<sup>7</sup> Many regions within the Low

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1. Leendert P. Louwe Kooijmans, "History of the Low Countries," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

Countries banded together into guilds, all with the intent of maintaining some independence from the various princes that controlled the region over time. These guilds wanted to control their trade. This trend of merchants uniting in the common interests of the region's trade would continue into the Habsburg occupation of the region. Even after the acquisition of the region by the Habsburgian dynasty, the Low Countries would continue to maintain as much autonomy as possible, both in trade and cultural practices.

### 3. Habsburgs and International Relations

The Habsburgs were an incredibly politically adept family that would eventually touch every royal power in Europe. From 1516 to 1659, the Habsburgian dynasty dominated the political scene in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Powers under the influence of the Habsburgs included Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, Milan and Austria, as well as the Low Countries.<sup>9</sup> Once under the Habsburgian sphere of influence, it increased the ease with which goods and ideas could travel around the continent. The direction of this flow varied, as is evident in examining the spread of Mannerism around the continent.

Now a part of a great European dynasty, the Low Counties were now connected more firmly to the rest of Europe. There is little doubt that the region was already connected to other regions, but the inclusion within the Habsburgian dynasty could only have increased their importance in international trade. Unfortunately for many of the now powerful guilds, inclusion into this empire was viewed only as another barrier towards complete trading independence. None of the wealthy merchants wanted to be taxed to pay for the wars of a ruler they did not choose.<sup>10</sup> This led to an increasing desire to be independent from the Empire as well as maintain total control of the regions trade.<sup>11</sup>

The Habsburgian occupation of the Low Countries was a crucial influence that helped to shape the course of the art of the region.,<sup>12</sup> if only to maintain cultural independence from their rulers. This period in the history of the Low Countries is marked by great strides in artistic development. During this period, many artistic developments that would eventually spread southwards to become known as hallmarks of the Renaissance period were developed. Realistic depictions of life and Mannerist developments would develop during these transitional years just prior to the occupation of the Habsburgs. The Italian Renaissance painters would adopt these developments in later centuries. But while these Manneristic trends would be adopted, one of the most visible facet of the "Italian Renaissance" tradition, that of humoralism, was almost certainly developed by artists in the Low Countries.

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8. Koenigsberger, H. G. *The Hapsburgs and Europe: 1516-1660* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), xi.

9. Koenigsberger, *The Habsburgs*, 61.

10. Ibid, 28.

11. Ibid, 32.

12. Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, ed., *From Rembrandt to Vermeer*, (Milan: Motta, 2008), 14.

#### 4. Humoral Theory

Humoral theory, in a nutshell, is a complicated method to explain people's health, behavior, and personality that started with Hippocrates. Humoral theory represents a collection of ideas that within each person there existed four separate substances, or humors, that influenced all facets of a person's health:<sup>13</sup> black bile (melancholy), yellow bile (choler), blood, and phlegm.<sup>14</sup> These four humors, while controlling the functions of the body, also controlled the behaviors and physical appearance of person. In short, these different humors had different characteristics associated with them. These four humors were also associated with the four elements. The humors were associated with the four elements:<sup>15</sup> fire, earth, water, and air. Fire is both hot and dry; earth is both dry and cold; water is both cold and wet; and air is wet and hot. These elements were thought to exist in the human body as the four humors. Air was associated with blood, water with phlegm, fire with yellow bile, and earth with black bile.<sup>16</sup> These traits were not defined by Aristotle, but they are most associated with him.

These different associations and characteristics manifested themselves differently in the appearance of gender differences. The internal temperature, according to Aristotle, was thought to control the differences between men and women.<sup>17</sup> This humoral temperature difference was what made a man manly and vice versa. While a female was wet and cold, due to her menstrual cycle, a man was hot and dry. Hot counters cold, and dry counters wet. Aristotle also thought that the organs themselves had an individual temperature and that the internal organs balanced each other.<sup>18</sup> This was important because the internal organs, specifically those of the female, like the uterus and ovaries, helped to determine the overall temperature of a body. These internal organs, and their temperature, helped to dictate the outwards appearance of person.

Because Aristotle thought the woman is wet and cold due to her menstruation,<sup>19</sup> this would force the man, as the opposite of a woman, to be hot and dry. Because men are warm, they are superior than women; because women are cooler, they are lesser. Aristotle attributes different characteristics with warm and cold. For example, he associates warmth with activity, superiority, and ability, while cold is associated with passivity, inferiority, and inactivity.<sup>20</sup> These traits can

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13. Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

14. Sirasi, Nancy. *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 105.

15. Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 659.

16. Ibid, 25.

17. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences*, 21.

18. Ibid, 23.

19. Ibid, 23.

20. Ibid, 23.

be seen quite obviously in the outward appearance of people. The man, being active, spent much of his time outdoors, participating in very physical behaviors requiring his strength. The woman, being the opposite to man, spent much of her time inside occupying herself with womanly pursuits.

These humors manifested themselves very physically in a person. The most obvious distinctions among people was that of gender. Men, in the humoral mindset, were ideal suited to active pursuits in the outdoors. This would result in a muscular, hardened, very tan physic. Men that exhibited these traits were seen as perfect forms of masculine identity. They also were always seen as being active, moving from one activity to the next with confidence and power. Women were seen in a completely different light. The ideal woman was soft, fleshy, and pale because she was not capable of the heavy labor that men were able to achieve. She was ill-suited to be out of doors because she was not strong enough to withstand the elements, so her skin was always white. Because she was passive and not capable of activity, she spent much of her time reclined or sitting.

If the idea of humors originates with Aristotle, then the recovery of ancient texts during the late Medieval period certainly would indicate a resurgence within the societies that embraced his idea. These ideals of the perfect man and woman would be completely incorporated in the cultural flowering of the Renaissance. By seeking the humoral influences discussed above in art works from the 15th -16th centuries, the origins of humoral depictions of humanity can begin to be determined. Surprisingly, these depictions do not originate in the heart of the Renaissance, but far to the north in the Low Countries. So, if we are to say that humoralism is a deciding feature of Renaissance artwork, and that the Renaissance began in Italy, it would be safe to assume that traces of humoral influences would be present in Italy before anywhere else. But, by examining the dates of Renaissance paintings in Italy and the Low Countries, we can see that this is not the case.

## **5. Independent Trends in the Low Countries**

The Low Countries, being a trading powerhouse in Northern Europe, has historically exhibited a stubborn independent streak. While we associate this with trade guilds,<sup>21</sup> it also extends into their cultural history as well. And while they exhibited other historically independent trends such as their religious practices,<sup>22</sup> their independence was mostly economical. The Low Countries, due to their position on the North Sea, as well as the Rhine River, had a very lucrative position collecting tolls and making money from international trade. This wealth and superb trading position meant that the established guilds of the Low Countries had an incentive to maintain independence from stronger powers to avoid taxes.<sup>23</sup> This independence extended from

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21. Kooijmans, "History of the Low Countries."

22. Suzan Folkerts, "Reading the Bible Lessons at Home: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in the Low Countries," *Church History & Religious Culture* 93, no. 2 (2013) : 220.

23. Koenigsburger, *The Habsburgs*, 31.

economic policies to cultural practices, this includes art. Trade inspired this independence and it was not only felt in political matters, but also in artistic trends of the region.

The art maintains an independent style for decades, selectively adopting practices from other regions. Thousands of paintings were created for export.<sup>24</sup> It is in the Low Countries that humoral theory and Mannerism were incorporated into art and spread to other regions of Europe. 15- 16<sup>th</sup> century art from the Low Countries highlights the development of humoral theory and a mannerist style of painting that does not exist in contemporary Italian art. And the largest collection of art from this region is located in Berlin, Germany at the Gemäldegalerie.

## 6. The Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, Germany

The collection examined in this research is that of the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, Germany. The reason this museum was chosen as a research site was because this state museum has an extensive collection of Early Nederlandisher art. This is due to its extensive history of collecting.<sup>25</sup> The collection of paintings at the Gemäldegalerie has been in development since the 1830's.<sup>26</sup> Due to its proximity to the Low Countries it had the opportunity to purchase many paintings from various royal and private collections. The museum contains over 1,500 paintings, which include paintings from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their collection of art from the Low Countries stretches from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>27</sup> This collection has the added benefit of being neatly ordered by region and date, allowing paintings of a similar area and age group to be easily compared. Additionally, the collection is ordered by area and chronology. Within the Galerie, it is easy to see the changing art style within the collection.

In the examination of selected pieces within the Gemäldegalerie, several different criteria were examined in determining if the Italian Renaissance had influenced a painting. First, evidence of humoral influences was examined. Humoral theory, that is, the explanation of sex differences between men and women, had a definite influence on the Italian Renaissance,<sup>28</sup> and in this research, the examination primarily lies in the search for humoral influences before they appear in Italy in the collection of art from the Low Countries. If this can be determined, then it can be said that humoral influences spread south, and not north from Italy to the rest of the Continent.

Additionally, the art of the Low Countries was known before the Renaissance for its realism.<sup>29</sup> In fact, several Italian artists chose to study art of this region for its superb portrayal of light in the reflections of objects. Hendrick ter Brugghen, an artist from the region, actually traveled from

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24. Lindemann, *From Rembrandt*, 20.

25. The Gemäldegalerie informational pamphlet.

26. Gemäldegalerie pamphlet.

27. Gemäldegalerie pamphlet.

28. Piers D. G. Britton, "The signs of faces: Leonardo on physiognomic science and the 'Four Universal States of Man,'" *Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 2. (2002) : 145.

29. Lindemann, *From Rembrandt*, 27-28.



Utrecht to study Carvaggio, one of the most influential Italian artists of the Renaissance.<sup>30</sup> This example of ter Brugghen, highlights cultural exchange between these two regions. Perhaps, with the spread of the Manneristic tendencies which developed in the North, it also spread south with humoral coloring to influence the great Italian artists of the Late Renaissance.

## 7. The Paintings

“The Madonna in the Church” was painted by Jan van Eyck, a Belgian painter, in 1440. This religious subject has enjoyed many incarnations within the art of the Low Countries. Mary is standing in the foreground, centered, and the replication of a Gothic dome in the background is superbly executed. The arches of the dome are finely wrought and give a depth to the painting. This painting is also different than other contemporary paintings because of her coloring and delicate nature of her face; this would become typical of humoral colorations in women. Her downcast eyes betray her modesty befitting of a good woman, and her rosy cheeks and lips contrast highly with her pale delicate skin. Her crown, however, has a characteristic Dutch attention to shine on her jewels, with the facets reflecting like quite realistically. Her flowing robe is reminiscent of a waterfall and covers her entirely., harnessing the color of the element water, conjuring an image of water to the viewers mind. Van Eyck’s painting is unusual for the time, and could be considered an outlier when compared to his contemporaries. But van Eyck’s painting, including humoralistic themes broke ground within the artistic culture of the region. Others would emulated his pattern of humoral coloring in later years.

Rogier van der Weyden, a contemporary of van Eyck, also painted scenes depicting Jesus and Mary. “The Alter of our Lady” was painted in 1445, just five years after van Eyck’s “Madonna”. The three-paneled piece also has Gothic style arches, typical of the region, which can be seen in the back of the rooms and pale in comparison to van Eyck’s masterful reproduction. The first panel on the left depicts Mary and Joseph sitting with the newborn Jesus in a room with two windows at the back. Additionally, the panel of fabric behind them fails to create depth. The second panel depicts Mary with Jesus after his crucifixion. In the background of this panel, there is a country town, which appears just as a small drawing in the background. There is little light outside indicating shadows or depth. The third and final panel depicts Jesus returning from the dead, with injuries intact, to speak with his mother. Van der Weyden’s alter does not contain any traditional humoral influences, an attempt to color Jesus and Mary in humoral colors is made and this highlights a slow transition into humorally influenced art.

Petrus Christus, another artist from Belgium, was active for much of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Christus’ “Mary with the Son” was painted in 1452. In this painting, Mary holds Jesus on the right of the painting, while a friar kneels on the left, with a woman standing behind him on the left. All of the faces in this painting are delicately painted, typical of Christus’ work. The faces themselves are reminiscent of medieval art, as they lack the subtleties of light that create depth. This painting lacks humoral influences regarding skin color, showing that Christus had not yet adapted a humorally influenced composition.

A second Christus piece also dating to 1452 titled “Judgment Day” has zero humoral influences. It is a chaotic image featuring the Gate of Paradise and the Gate of Hell, as well as Jesus and

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30. Ibid, 22.

smiting angel; this was a depiction of the afterlife. It is quite horrible, with dozens of miserable looking figures being punished by the angel Gabriel. It remains heavily influenced by medieval styling and shows that Christus had varying stylistic changes in his career, as shown by a painting that will be discussed later. Additionally, there are no humoral influences present in this painting.

“The Adoration of the Kings” painted by Hugo van der Goes, another Belgian, in 1470 is a superb example depicting the developing trend of Northern Artists combining the linear perspective, with the realistic style developed in the Low Countries. This painting is huge, and incredibly rich in detail. The fabrics, being stunningly rendered, give the appearance of soft, folded fabric as well as heavily embroidered and rich. Even the rocks in the foreground exhibit immense attention to detail. Mary and Jesus and Joseph are all seated on the left of the painting, in the corner of a dilapidated stone building, surrounded by the kings and their retinue. The kings are all positioned on the right. Humorally, this painting is a perfect example of humorally influenced depictions of humanity. The skin on the hands and faces of the subjects reflect their ideal coloring: pale, white, soft, and supple skin of Mary and Jesus; and the tanned, leathery, rough, and (in the case of Joseph) wrinkled skin all exhibits what a manly ideal is. The contrast between the men and Mary is very obvious when viewed together as they almost appear to be different species. This painting, 100% exhibits humoral influences.

Another painting by Petrus Christus with a particularly beautiful and delicate subject is “A Portrait of a Young Woman”. This was painted in 1470, the same year as van der Goes “Adoration”, but much later in his own career. Christus’ portrait depicts a young woman sitting in front of a wooden wall. The woman in question has very fine features delicately rendered jewelry and clothing. This woman, and her clothing, indicates humoral inspiration, as is evident by her blue clothing and a bodice laced with pearls. These tiny pearls in the embroidery in the hat as well as her necklace are associated with water, as pearls come from the sea. Every one of these tiny seed pearls has a reflection from the same light source. The slight color in her cheeks contrasts with her snow-white skin, highlighting that ideal womanhood is not far from this girl. Something that is very difficult to see in the painting is the extremely fine lace shawl attached with a pin at the top of her bodice. This is a prime example of Dutch realism. If one looks extremely closely, one can see the fine mesh around her neck. This painting by Christus is so different from the earlier two already discussed in this paper. Where his early paintings are coarse, this painting explodes with delicate, fine details, particular concerning the coloring of his subjects. This painting is also definitely humoral in nature, and retains the realistic style of the region as well.

Hans Memmeling painted his own “Mary with the Son” in 1485, 15 years after Christus’ painting. Memmeling’s “Mary” has an altogether different flavor than Christus. Humoral influences are evident in this piece, being present not only in coloring, but pose. This Mary has modest, downcast eyes, a soft delicate face, rosy cheeks, and reddish lips. Her hair flows down her head, blending into the soft blue of her cloak. Jesus is sitting on an embroidered pillow in front of her, and her delicate fingers and wrists look particularly feminine. His baby hand is posed in a sign of blessing while taking the apple from Mary’s left hand. Her gaze is even more modest and passive than seen in Christus’ painting of Mary with her Son. Even the baby Jesus’s toes appear delicate. The lighting and shadows present in this painting, and on Mary and Jesus, give these subject’s



depth and realism, two things that were really lacking in Christus' "Mary with the Son". This mother and son contrast even more with the next Mary and Jesus painting, Michel Sittow's "Mary with the Son". This painting is also influenced by the humors, but not as strongly as Michel Sittow's version.

Sittow's Mary and Jesus painting is the most humoral of the three discussed here. His "Mary with the Son" was painted in 1515 or 1518. This painting is realistic and thoroughly a pleasure to view. Mary's downcast eyes, golden hair, and delicate face and hands are rendered with extreme ability by Sittow. Jesus, too, looks plump and healthy and his delicately rendered face mirrors the skill shown in his mother's. Even the fine pleats in her bodice are painted with the same attention given her hair and face, a fine example of realism and humoral coloring. The fabric folds in her robe and head covering are also extremely realistic. The smaller details in this painting are what give it life. The softness evident in this painting, add further evidence to Sittow utilizing the humors to paint the ideal version of Mary and her Son. This painting is again, humoral in nature, while utilizing the realism of the Low Countries superbly.

The "Triptych of Augustinus van Teylingen" was painted by Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsane in 1518. This very large alter piece contains three panels. The center panel contains Mary and baby Jesus surrounded by angels. The wings contain the coissoners of the painting as well as two saints. The figures also have superbly rendered clothing, with beautiful folds and embroidery present. This painting also exhibits a typical rendering of humoral influences between the genders. The three women and the child are all painted extremely pale with rosy cheeks and perfect red lips, while the two men are ruddy faced and much less delicate than the soft, fragile women. Mary in particular is extremely feminine. She has downcast, modest eyes and hold Jesus quite passively while he raises his arm in blessing and holds the viewers gaze directly. Interestingly, in the background directly behind Mary, is a lake. This lake and its waterways frame her perfectly, and at each shoulder she is surrounded by water. This is an obvious allusion to her femininity in that she and her life-giving wetness, that is, of her humoral composition, carried the Son of God.. Many things combine in this work to create a magnificent example of Northern Renaissance painting. This painting has both humoral influences in coloring and presence of water.

"The Throned Madonna" was painted by Quinten Massys of Antwerp in 1525. This painting is another excellent example of Northern Renaissance painting. Both of their features are delicately painted, with her soft skin and her red robe, representing her holy duty as the Mother of God flows realistically to the floor. Her facial coloring fits the humoral pattern of the pale woman with rosy cheeks and lips, doubly highlighting her femininity. The delicate shadows around her neck and in the fabric give additional realism to the image. Her throne is also rendered to perfection. The swirls of color in the marble are extremely realistic. The perspective provided by the different lines of the throne and the end table creates realistic depth. This painting overall is an excellent example of what Dutch artists were capable of producing. The background in this painting is superbly executed with light and shadow being controlled very well by Massys. This painting is a perfect example of what mannerism and humoral theory is capable of producing.

"The Gold Weigher", which was painted by Jan Sanders van Hemessen in 1530 in Haarlem is another superb example of the Renaissance style of painting in the Low Countries. The subject of

this painting is a young woman weighing gold inside a cozy room with wooden paneling. The lines of the wood paneling and background create beautiful depth. Additionally, the subject's face is delicately painted with plump, rosy cheeks and red lips.. The light playing on her face is gentle and gives her a warmth and intimacy that gives the overall painting an enticing atmosphere. The woman is wearing a fur robe and some puffed sleeves in which all the pleats are delicately painted. The embroidery on her head covering as well as her sleeves and the attention to detail on the gold coins she is weighing all combine to create a beautiful painting. The combination of perspective as well as the humoral coloring of this woman is a gorgeous combination of the Italian movement, and the traditional realism of the region.

## **8. Conclusion**

There is an assumption associated with the Italian Renaissance that all of the achievements of Renaissance artists originated within the Italian Peninsula. Realistic manneristic tendencies and humoral colorations of people have long been associated with the Italian Renaissance. This view is erroneous because humoralist influences and they hyper-realistic trends of mannerism are all present in Northern European Renaissance art of the Low Countries. Artists like van Eyck, van der Goes, and Sittow all painted humoral far earlier than their Italian contemporaries. Suggesting that Italy was not the origin for these artistic trends may come as a surprise to many, but the evidence suggesting otherwise is significant and should not be discarded.

Traditionally, the subsequent centuries following the Italian Renaissance have increasingly placed Italy on a pedestal of single-handedly bringing Europe out of some darker age. This misconception is damaging in that it undermines other regions contributions to the greater European Renaissance movement. The contributions of a culturally rich and vibrant Low Countries, seems to not factor into the average person's understanding of the Renaissance. Humoral influences, which have long been associated with the Ninja Turtle's namesakes, originated in the Low Countries, not Italy. These trends were imported and co-opted by the Italians. Additionally, the realism that was embraced by the Italians was a hallmark of art from the Low Countries, not something spontaneously developed by the Italians.

The contributions of Dutch artists to the greater Renaissance movement have been neglected over the centuries. While the reasons for this regional development have yet to be explored, it is worthwhile to explore the idea that Italy may not have been the center of Renaissance culture, and that perhaps, the Low Countries contributed far more than being simply a hub for trade.

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